



United States Department of Agriculture  
Marketing and Regulatory Programs  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
Livestock and Seed Program

MGC Instruction 400  
January 18, 2008  
Page 1 of 3

Meat Grading & Certification Branch

## **Personal Conduct Standards**

### **Purpose**

This Instruction provides employees with guidelines on developing and maintaining a professional image with industry personnel and the general public. The guidelines include responsibilities and conduct, prohibited activities, and related approval requirements. It is not intended to replace the provisions of applicable Department and Agency directives, Instructions, and regulations but should be used to supplement and clarify the sections of those documents that are of particular interest to Meat Grading and Certification (MGC) Branch employees.

### **Policy**

MGC Branch employees must maintain a high standard of honesty, integrity, and impartiality as well as conduct themselves in a manner that promotes industry and public trust and confidence in MGC Branch programs, services and personnel. It is essential that all MGC Branch employees strive to maintain a high level of professionalism in the performance of official duties and to avoid conduct and conflicts of interest. A professional image is essential to promoting industry and public confidence in our programs.

### **Trade Relationships**

All employees are expected to use clear and concise speech, exhibit a businesslike manner, exercise propriety, and maintain an appropriate personal appearance while performing official duties. The attitudes, actions, and appearances of employees have a significant impact on relationships with industry personnel. It is essential that the MGC Branch create a positive image and maintain favorable trade relationships by providing service in an accurate, decisive, tactful, and diplomatic manner. Therefore, graders must perform their duties fairly and impartially and avoid even the appearance of preferential treatment to any applicant.

During daily contacts at the plant level, supervisors and graders shall:

- A. Refrain from discussing matters pertaining to feeding, breeding, or management practices and their related costs.
- B. Not discuss one plant's operations/business with another plant.

- C. Avoid discussing official or personal problems with plant personnel; and not discuss future employment. Additionally, under no circumstances should supervisors or graders ask for or accept favors, gifts, gratuities or loans nor make purchases from or become obligated in anyway to applicants or potential applicants of our services.

Since meat graders are occasionally assigned to perform grading or certification duties for other government agencies, it is important that such agencies be considered as applicants of the service and treated accordingly.

### **Nonofficial Visits to Meatpacking and Processing Plants**

The MGC Branch Office must approve any unofficial visits (i.e., during annual leave, after duty hours, etc.) made to establishments by supervisors or graders located outside their duty station. If such approval is granted, supervisors and graders shall refrain from discussing with vendors or their employees, matters that pertain to the local grading or certification and appropriately refer any questions to the local supervisor. During approved visits to plants, supervisors and graders must exercise sound judgment to assure that their presence does not interfere with the work of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) or plant personnel.

### **Responsibilities**

All employees must:

- A. Avoid any action or interest that could create a conflict of interest or the appearance of one. In a few special cases, ownership of a farm or ranch could create an actual or apparent conflict of interest. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has reserved the right to examine every case individually to avoid such conflicts.
- B. Report all instances of misconduct to the MGC Branch Office. Cases involving bribery shall be reported as prescribed in [AMS Directive 365-1](#).
- C. Not buy and sell meats at the wholesale level or engage in livestock transactions with applicants of MGC Branch services. Employees or members of their families who are residents of the employee's household shall not purchase meat products, personally or through another individual, from a plant or establishment where grading or certification is performed, unless the store or outlet from which the purchase is made is open to the general public, and the price paid by the employee or member of their family is the same price paid by the general public. Exceptions may be granted if such a prohibition would constitute a severe hardship on the employee. Employees shall send requests for exceptions through the MGC Branch Office to the Branch Chief.
- D. Not abuse alcohol and drugs including prescription drugs. The MGC Branch is interested in the well-being of its employees and places great emphasis on maintaining a safe and efficient work environment. The achievement of this goal depends on the active cooperation of all employees. Employees are expected to have the same concern for personal safety and the safety of their fellow employees as they have for the performance of their work. The MGC Branch recognizes that alcoholism and chemical dependency are illnesses which can be treated, and the MGC Branch is prepared to offer assistance to affected employees. Employees who use or traffic in illegal drugs,

abuse alcohol and/or controlled substances pose unacceptable risks to the safe and efficient operation of the MGC Branch. In addition to jeopardizing employee safety and/or impacting on performance, conduct and reliability, substance abuse is illegal and could lead to criminal prosecution.

E. Annually complete the ethics training through AgLearn and review and conduct themselves in accord with applicable provisions of:

1. [Departmental Directive DR4070-735-001, Employee Responsibilities and Conduct.](#)
2. [AMS Directive 3300.1 Use of Government Office Equipment.](#)
3. [Title 7, Code of Federal Regulations, section 54.12.](#)
4. [Directive 362.1, Political Activity.](#)
5. MGC Instruction 408, Contractor Issued Individual Employee Charge Cards.
6. MGC Instruction 410, Leave.
7. [Human Resources Desk Guide, Subchapter 4630 - Absence and Leave.](#)
8. MGC Instruction 430, Telephone Calling Cards.

Supervisors must:

- A. Inform all new employees of conduct requirements stated in this Instruction and ensure that employees under their supervision are familiar with applicable conduct rules.
- B. Discuss conduct requirements with each employee annually in conjunction with the employee's performance rating discussion and have the employee check the "YES" sections on Block 17 of Form AD-435P, "Performance Appraisal," to confirm the discussion.

This instruction contains only a few of the employee conduct and responsibilities issues.

Employees must be knowledgeable of and comply with the information contained in all applicable documents.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

# United States Department of Agriculture Performance Appraisal

1 Social Security No.

2 Position Number

3 Pay Plan

4 Occup. Series

5 Name (Last, First, Middle Initial)

6 Grade/Step or Pay Level

7 Appraisal Period

From

To

8 Official Position Title

9 Organization Structure Code

10 Duty Station

11 Funding Unit

12 Agency Use

13 NFC Use

## Instructions

Blocks 1 through 10, completed by NFC, should be reviewed and, if necessary, corrected.

Block 11. Enter funding unit number.

Block 14. Enter brief description of performance elements.

Block 15A. Check performance elements identified as critical.

Blocks 15B, 15C, 15D. Rate actual performance by entering 2 for critical elements and 1 for non-critical elements in appropriate column.

Blocks 15E, 15F, 15G. Enter total of each column.

Block 15H. Enter total from 15E, 15F, and 15G.

Block 16A. Check off the correct summary rating described in decisions table (16B).

Blocks 17 through 22. Self-explanatory.

14  
Performance Elements

15A  
Critical  
Element

15B  
Exceeds  
Fully  
Successful

15C  
Meets  
Fully  
Successful

15D  
Does Not  
Meet Fully  
Successful

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

16B Decision Table (check off Summary Rating in block 16A)

Rating of Outstanding if 15E equals 15H.

Rating of Unacceptable if any critical element is rated in 15D.

Rating of Superior if no element is rated in 15D; 15F is greater than zero; and 15E is greater than 15F.

Rating of Marginal if 15G is greater than 15E, and no critical element is rated in 15D.

Rating of Fully Successful if none of the above apply.

15E Exceeds

15F Meets

15G Does  
Not Meet

15H Enter total  
15E + 15F + 15G = 15H

15H

16A Summary Rating (See Decision Table in 16B)

☐ Outstanding  
☐ Superior  
☐ Fully Successful  
☐ Marginal  
☐ Unacceptable

17 Employee - Standards of Conduct and Ethical Responsibilities (Check off appropriate boxes)

a I have a copy of the Governmentwide standards of ethical conduct and any USDA and agency supplemental regulations governing conduct. ☐ YES ☐ NO

b I attended the required annual ethics training. ☐ YES ☐ NO

18 Employee's signature

Date

If employee did not sign, state reason.

(Instructions for resolutions of disputes are on the reverse of employee copy.)

19 Supervisor's Signature

Date

20 Reviewer's Signature

Date

21 Approving Official's or Funding Unit Manager's Signature (optional)

Date

## GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Performance Management Recognition System (PMRS) Employees.

Follow the agency grievance procedures.

Non-PMRS Employees.

Follow either the agency grievance procedures or negotiated grievance procedures, but not both.

Contact your servicing Personnel Office for specific instructions or applicable procedures for resolving performance appraisal disagreements.